Long Island Botanical Society

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# The Nature of Sagamore Hill

Lois Lindberg, Volunteer Naturalist at Sagamore Hill National Historic Site

Sagamore Hill National Historic Site, former home of Theodore Roosevelt (TR) in Oyster Bay, NY, is perched between Oyster Bay Harbor and Cold Spring Harbor. "The house stands right on the top of the hill, separated by fields and belts of woodland from all other houses, and looks out over the bay and the Sound" (Roosevelt 1913, p. 318). Most visitors come to the site for its association with the 26th president (or more recently, as a great place to walk their dogs). Aside from possibly recognizing Roosevelt as the "conservation president," fewer are aware of the natural history that surrounds them on this 83-acre property.

Figure 1. Sagamore Hill woodland road circa 1904, from an old postcard.

Figure 2. Nature trail, view to Eel Creek. [photo by L. Lindberg]

Apart from Theodore Roosevelt's distinguished political career, he held a lifelong love of the outdoors. It was said that he began and ended his life as a naturalist. Friends with the likes of John Burroughs, Frank Chapman, John Muir, Gifford Pinchot and others, he was recognized as one of the best field naturalists of his time.

TR started his first journal with notes and sketches in 1868 at the age of 10. He was a keen observer of his surroundings. On family trips abroad and on visits to the Hudson Valley, Adirondacks, and the White Mountains of New Hampshire, young Theodore explored everything, from the markings on salamanders to the study of over 100 species of lichens and fungi.

Members of the Roosevelt family had vacationed in Oyster Bay since the 1850s, and in 1874 TR's father leased a home on Cove Road, less than two miles from the future Sagamore Hill site. Four months of every summer were spent here for years afterward. As Theodore wandered through nearby rural Glen Cove and Lloyd Neck, he wrote his Journal of Natural History from 1874-76. By the time he attended Harvard, he fully intended to become a scientist, but was discouraged by the school's increasing emphasis on laboratory work rather than outdoor exploration and fieldwork. However, when it came time to build his home in 1885, he chose a parcel of farmland near his family in the countryside he loved so much.

Most of TR's field notes throughout his life reflect a major interest in birds and other animals (Figure 5). Even so, he often made detailed descriptions of the environment as well. It was no longer enough just to identify a bird but he also described its habitat by including botanical lists and other fauna in his writings. The Philadelphia *Telegram* declared in 1893, "No song of bird or flower, or the shyest plant which grows, escapes his appreciative notice" (Cutright 1956, p.57).

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# *Society News*

**LIBS 30-Year Anniversary Field Trip.** LIBS has a tradition of going on a week-long field trip to an exotic, flowery region every five years. Past trips have included adventures in Costa Rica, the Great Smoky Mountains, Newfoundland, and Florida. The goal is to offer high-quality natural history trips at sensible prices, with a focus on various aspects of natural life – plants, birds, butterflies, etc., but especially showy wildflowers. Planning for our 2016 trip has already started. Bob Gibbons has agreed to be our leader and has suggested Sweden as a potential destination. Dr. Gibbons has been described as "one of Britain's best naturalists" and has written about 40 books on many aspects of natural history and photography, including several floras. In 2011, Bob gave a talk to LIBS entitled "The most flowery places in the world." More information on this exciting trip will be included in the January 2015 issue of the LIBS newsletter.

Field Trip Reports:
The field trip to Pelham Bay Park, on August 17th, led by Becka Swadek and Leah Beckett, was an exploration of two marshes, one partly salty and the other totally salty. In the parking lot there was a lot of wild parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) plus balm mint (*Melissa officinalis*) and plume poppy (*Macleaya cordata*). In the totally salty marsh, ditch stonecrop (Penthorum sedoides) was discovered. The trip was attended by 9 people.

The trip to Oneonta on September 6th, led by Lois Lindberg and attended by Rich Kelly and Mike Feder, may have been low on number of attendees but was long on the list of territory covered: Emmond Pond Bog, Franklin Mountain, plus the Lindbergs' own land and nearby parks. The finds of the day were pale green orchis (*Platanthera flava*), followed by closed bottle gentian (*Gentiana andrewsii*) at the Lindbergs' place and subsequently stiff clubmoss (*Lycopodium annotinum*) at Emmond Pond Bog.

In Memoriam
This July marks the passing of Paul Stoutenburgh, 92. A longtime resident of Cutchogue, Paul was a leading conservationist of the North Fork, serving as trustee of The Nature Conservancy and director of the Peconic Land Trust, and writing a nature column for a local newspaper. He was a founding member of LIBS.

The LIBS Flora Atlas Committee News:
The committee has met over the summer and begun the review of maps and related data. Members agree to review 500 species a month for four months so that the work is completed by December. Steve Young contributed a list of species that should be eliminated because they are non-natives (waifs). These were reviewed and approved.

ERRATA:
Society News in the last issue of this newsletter referred to the pyxie moss remaining on Long Island by an incorrect species name. The correct name is *Pyxidanthera barbulata*.

*(Sagamore Hill continued from cover)*

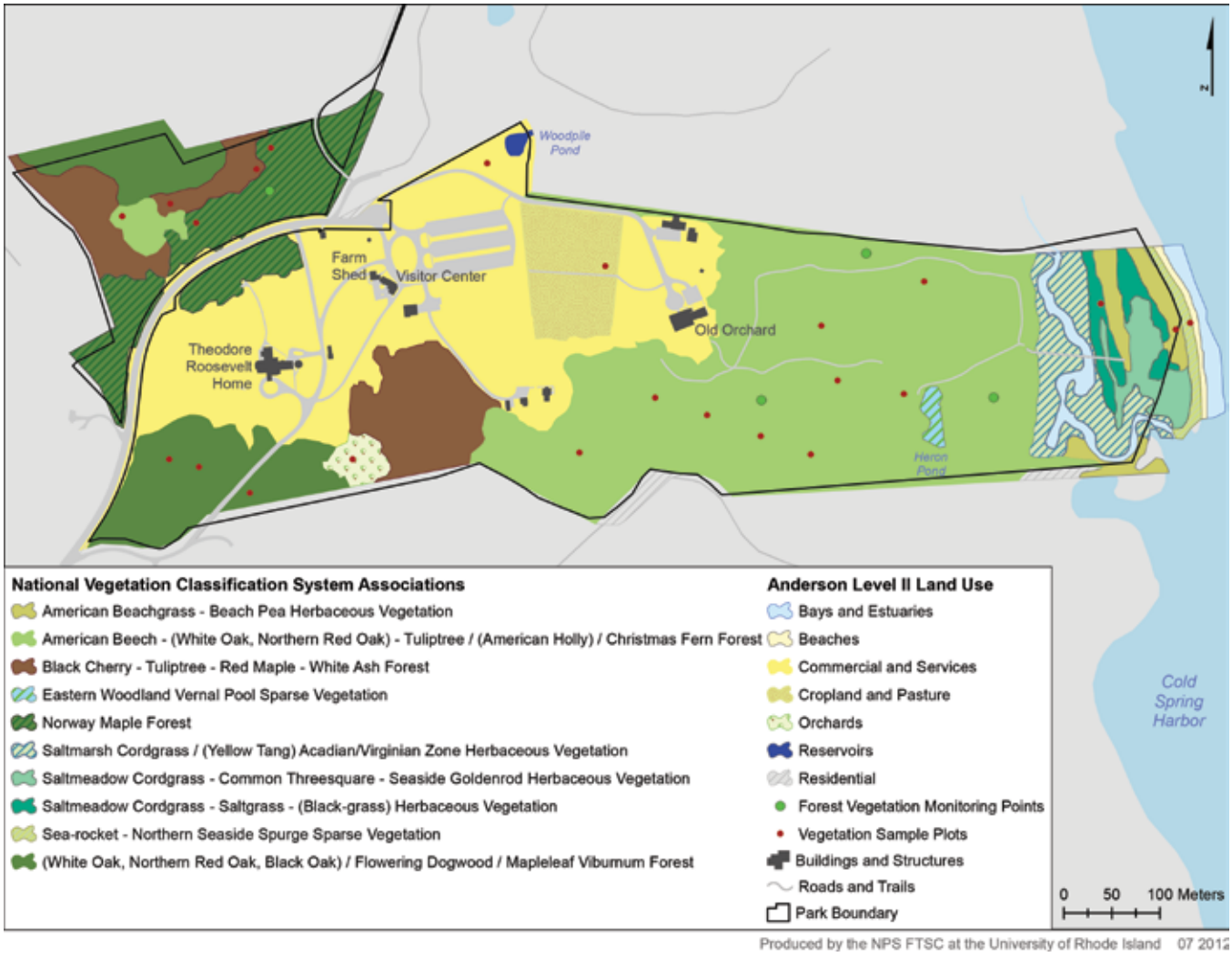


Figure 3. Sagamore Hill National Historic Site – National Vegetation Classification Map [From James-Pirri, 2013]

Despite his statement that the Adirondacks had wilderness but Long Island had woods, and was not as rich floristically as the Hudson Valley, TR noted "Early in April there is one hillside near us which glows like a tender flame with the white of the bloodroot. At the same time we find the shy mayflower, the trailing arbutus.... Then there are shadblow and delicate anemones...and then the thronging dogwoods fill the forests with their radiance...until the springtime splendor closes with the laurel. The late summer flowers follow, the flaunting lilies, and cardinal flowers... and the goldenrods and asters when the afternoons shorten..." (Roosevelt 1913, p. 319).

Sagamore Hill remained a rural country home where the Roosevelts could raise their families close to nature, but many changes have taken place in the landscape since Theodore's time. When he was a boy, most of Cove Neck was open hay fields, agricultural since the early 1700s. Cultivation on the old farms ceased, adjoining properties were sold and developed, and today the area is largely residential with maintained lawns and second growth woods. Sagamore Hill was turned over to the National Park Service (NPS) in 1963, with emphasis placed on maintaining the historic house and surrounding grounds. Reflecting Theodore Roosevelt's conservation ideals, in 1968 NPS designated 32 acres of woodland, salt marsh and beach as a Natural Environmental Study Area (Figure 3). The Eel Creek marsh and beach are surrounded by the waters of the Oyster Bay National Wildlife Refuge – a fitting designation, since Roosevelt founded the first national refuge in 1903.

The woodland in the northern section has been classified as a Mid-Atlantic Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest, or oak-tulip tree forest, and may well be the best remaining example of its kind in Cove Neck (Edinger 2008). Species typically found in this woodland, now as in the late 1800s, are tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), black oak (*Quercus velutina*), northern red oak (*Q. rubra*), sweet birch (*Betula lenta*), sassafras (*Sassafras*

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*(Sagamore Hill continued from page 31)*

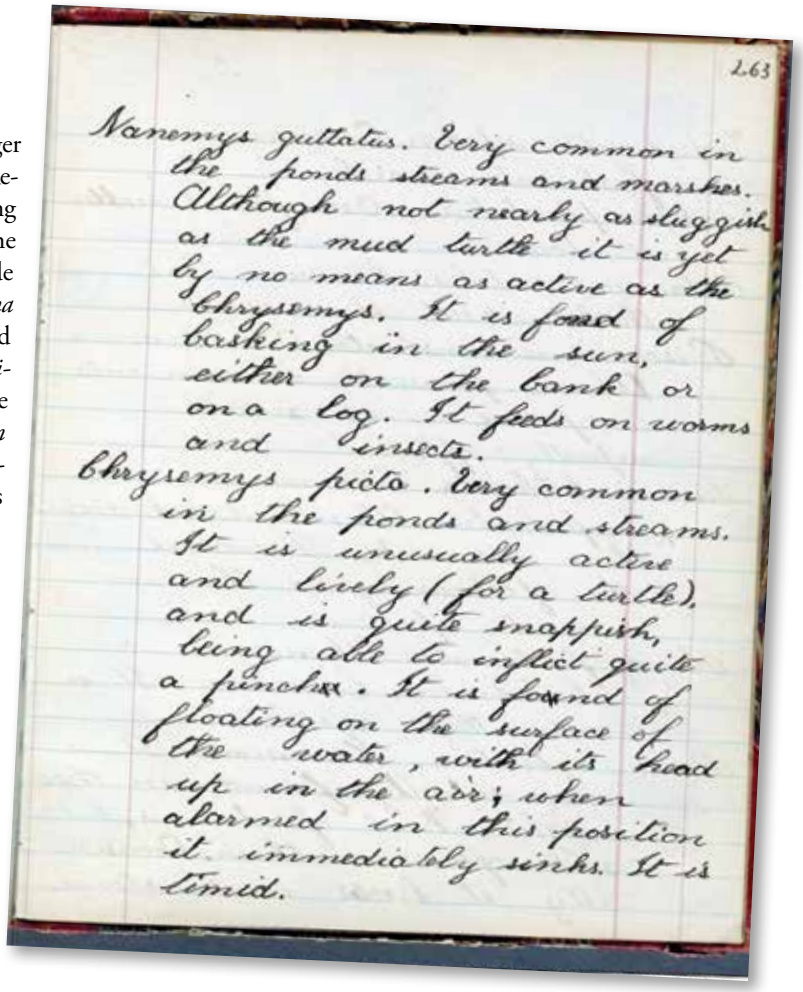
*albidum*), and mockernut hickory (*Carya alba*).

Of the wildflowers mentioned by TR, several are no longer on site although they occur elsewhere on Long Island. Recent surveys have not found bloodroot, anemone, trailing arbutus, or cardinal flower, but other components of the forest floor are prominent. Shade-tolerant flowers include jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*), Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*), wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*), lopseed (*Phryma leptostachya*), white wood aster (*Eurybia divaricata*), blue-stem goldenrod (*Solidago caesia*), Indian pipe (*Monotropa uniflora*), Canada mayflower (*Maianthemum canadense*), Solomon's seal (*Polygonum biflorum*) and Solomon's plume (*Maianthemum racemosum*). Several species of ferns also occur throughout the woods.

As successional vegetation took over the old fields, more non-natives unfortunately moved in. Norway maples (*Acer platanoides*) now compete for space in parts of the woods, and porcelain-berry (*Ampelopsis*) threatens to overtake the meadows' milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca)*, butterflyweed (*A. tuberosa*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), and black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*). Thirty non-native invasive plant species had been identified on the property (Werier 2006), and the newest threat to appear is mile-a-minute vine (*Persicaria perfoliata*). Efforts are currently being made by the National Park Service staff to control several of those invasives.

But the first botanical invasion came about during Roosevelt's tenure. "In 1910, after serving as one of the most popular presidents and initiating the national park system, saving vast areas of forestland, he sat helpless as

Figure 4. Tall ironweed, *Vernonia gigantea*. [photo by L. Lindberg]



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Nanemys guttatus. Very common in the ponds streams and marshes. Although not nearly as sluggish as the mud turtle it is yet by no means as active as the Chrysemys. It is fond of basking in the sun, either on the bank or on a log. It feeds on worms and insects.

Chrysemys picta. Very common in the ponds and streams. It is unusually active and lively (for a turtle), and is quite snappish, being able to inflict quite a punch. It is found of floating on the surface of the water, with its head up in the air; when alarmed in this position it immediably sinks. It is timid.

Figure 5. An entry about turtles from TR's journal Field Book of Zoology, written in 1877 at age 19. From the Theodore Roosevelt collection, Harvard University Library.

he looked up at the sickened trees on his homeland. The chestnut blight had reached Long Island. Spreading at a rate of 20 to 50 miles a year, it affected every single American Chestnut tree from Manhattan to Montauk in a decade's time" (Potente 2003). Theodore Roosevelt considered this to be one of the greatest losses in his life. In his autobiography, he described "the second week in July, when the blossoming of the chestnut trees patches the woodlands with frothy greenish yellow" followed by this footnote: "Alas! The chestnut blight has now destroyed the chestnut trees, and robbed the woods of one of their distinctive beauties" (Roosevelt 1913, p. 327). A few stump sprouts can still be found, but they too succumb to the disease.

The news is not all bad, though. As part of his survey, David Werier found a surprise, one New York State endangered species. A single patch of tall ironweed (*Vernonia giganteum*) stands in a field like a purple beacon along the fence-line (Fig. 4). Was it here in a pasture during TR's time? Maybe not. Or were seeds brought in with crop forage in later years? No one is quite sure.

Sagamore Hill remains as a tribute to the life of a remarkable political figure and an outstanding naturalist. Much more can be said about this historic location - bluebirds nesting once again in the meadows, the small pond where night herons roosted, the shoreline where TR camped out with his children and rowed across the harbor. Over the years, Sagamore Hill has retained much of the natural character that it possessed when Theodore Roosevelt called it home. The preserve is not huge but it has a great story to tell. You'll just have to come and see for yourself.

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# Field Trips

**OCTOBER 4, 2014 (SATURDAY) 11 AM**
*Cranberry Bog Preserve,*
*Riverhead, Suffolk County, NY*
Trip leader: Andrew Greller
Email: agreller2@optonline.net
(Co-listed with the North Shore Land Alliance)

Join botanist Andy Greller to explore this magnificent community, complete with carnivorous plants, when it is at its most beguiling.

**Directions:** Please Email mdfeder2001@yahoo.com for meeting place and directions. Enrollment is limited.

**OCTOBER 18, 2014 (SATURDAY) 10 AM**
*North Fork Preserve, Northville,*
*Town of Riverhead, Suffolk County, NY*
Trip leader: Eric Lamont
Email: elamont@optonline.net

The day will include about 2 miles of walking and the emphasis will be on the diversity of ecological communities and the dominant plant species that characterize them. Many different freshwater wetland communities will be observed and classified, as well as a rare upland forest ecosystem. Bring lunch and be prepared for ticks. Participants must register with trip leader to attend.

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*Join LIBS today!*
*Annual Membership is $20 payable to:*
***Long Island Botanical Society***

*Mail your dues to:*
*Carol Johnston, LIBS Treasurer*
*347 Duck Pond Road*
*Locust Valley, NY 11560*

***NOTE:***
***Membership renewals are due in January***

# Some Recent Long Island Plant Sightings

Compiled by Eric Lamont, LIBS President

***Arethusa bulbosa***, Dragon's Mouth (Orchidaceae, the Orchid Family) (Figure 1). One hundred years ago, this stunning orchid had been reported from more than two dozen localities on Long Island. Today it is known only from Montauk where Vicki Bustamante observed six flowering individuals on 2 June 2014. In 1923, Norman Taylor wrote: "about the end of May this part of the [Montauk] peninsula is aflame with *Arethusa bulbosa*, in fact it is more common here than elsewhere within the observation of the writer."

Figure 1. *Arethusa bulbosa*. [photo by Tom Nelson]

***Bromus rigidus***, Ripgut-grass (Poaceae, the Grass Family). This distinct grass with long, conspicuous awns is native of the Mediterranean region and until recently has been known in New York only from Suffolk County. During the past three years, Michael Feder has reported it from four localities in Brooklyn and Queens, including large populations at Marine Park and along the Brooklyn Queens Expressway where it grows in disturbed soils with other non-native herbs. This species is sometimes recognized as *Bromus diandrus* ssp. *rigidus*.

***Dichanthelium scoparium***, Velvet Panic-grass (Poaceae, the Grass Family) (Figure 2). In 2007, Mary Laura Lamont noticed an unfamiliar panic-grass in a field bordering woodlands at the William Floyd Estate in Mastic Beach. By 2012, the colony had aggressively spread to form a thick mat covering approximately ½ acre. After unsuccessful attempts to have the species identified, vouchers were sent to David Werier in 2013. In August 2013, David replied: "I took a break and looked at your *Dichanthelium*. Nice indeed. It is clearly one I have not seen before. I tentatively believe it is *D. scoparium*. This is a species I have been wanting to see for a long time and as you know it is a listed and very rare plant in New York." However, the specimen lacked one apparently important diagnostic character: the leaf sheaths were not viscid near the apex. David concluded, "I know Rob Naczi is working on *Dichanthelium* these days. I will see him at the end of the month and can show him your specimen." Next month, David again replied: "I showed the *Dichanthelium* you sent me to Rob last week. He confirmed that indeed it is *D. scoparium*. So the alleged viscid band seems like a useless character."

***Drosera ×beleziana***, Sundew hybrid (Droseraceae, the Sundew Family). Matthew Kaelin recently discovered this very rare carnivorous plant hybrid on Long Island, the first report from New York. The parents are *Drosera rotundifolia* (round-leaved sundew) and *D. intermedia* (spatulate-leaved sundew). The hybrids were found growing in *Sphagnum* moss hummocks on the edge of a pond in an Atlantic white cedar swamp in the Peconic River watershed, once home to a commercial cranberry bog.

***Fatoua villosa*,** Mulberry Weed (Moraceae, the Mulberry Family) (Figure 3). A native of eastern Asia, mulberry weed was first reported for North America from Louisiana in 1964 and rapidly expanded its range into the eastern and midwestern states, apparently spreading from the distribution of horticultural materials. In 2003 it was first reported from upstate New York and eastern Massachusetts and in 2004 from Long Island. In 2014, Margaret Conover confirmed that *F. villosa* is indeed an established member of Long Island's flora. She reported a population established in Stony Brook, probably introduced from horticultural materials. It is likely that this species is more widely spread on Long Island than currently reported.

***Oenothera laciniata***, Cut-leaved Evening-primrose (Onagraceae, the Evening-primrose Family). Historically, this species has been considered very rare in New York. As recently as 2010, New York Natural Heritage Program listed it as endangered (S1), with five or fewer extant sites known throughout the state. But during the past three years, Michael Feder has found this species at approximately 15 localities throughout western Long Island, mostly in the vicinity of Far Rockaway and Marine Park. It has also been recently reported by Eric Lamont from along railroad tracks in Calverton, Suffolk County. This apparent rapid northern range extension into Long Island also has been recently observed in other species such as *Eupatorium serotinum* (late-flowering thoroughwort), *Froelichia gracilis* (slender cottonweed), *Gamochaeta purpurea* (purple cudweed), and *Heterotheca subaxillaris* ssp. *latifolia* (camphorweed golden-aster).

***Orobanche uniflora***, One-flowered Cancer-root (Orobanchaceae, the Broom-rape Family). Although not considered rare on Long Island, this bizarre flowering plant is always an unexpected treat to find. Throughout its range this parasitic broom-rape is somewhat local in distribution and populations are usually small, often consisting of only two or three individuals. On 4 June 2014, Rich Kelly found more than two dozen blooming plants of *O. uniflora* at Breezy Point, Queens, making it one of the largest Long Island populations reported in recent years.

Figure 2. *Dichanthelium scoparium.* [Robert H. Mohlenbrock, hosted by the USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / USDA SCS. 1991. *Southern wetland flora: Field office guide to plant species.* South National Technical Center, Fort Worth.]

***Persicaria extremiorientalis***, Oriental Smartweed (Polygonaceae, the Buckwheat Family). On an August 2013 LIBS field trip to Edgewood Preserve, Michael Feder identified *P. extremiorientalis* and gave an update on the taxonomic history of the species in eastern USA. Prior to 2010, the species was not included in any flora or monograph of American Polygonaceae, and most collections had been erroneously identified as *Polygonum lapathifolium* and/or *P. persicaria* (=*Persicaria maculosa*). Daniel Atha et al. from the New York Botanical Garden clarified the confusion in a 2010 paper published in the Journal of the Torrey Botanical Society (vol. 137). *Persicaria extremiorientalis* was first collected in North America by Joseph Monachino from the Canarsie area of Brooklyn, New York, on 30 July 1961. Since then, it has been collected approximately 20 times on Long Island, with other collections from the Atlantic coastal region of Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, and North Carolina.

***Rhododendron prinophyllum***, Early Azalea (Ericaceae, the Heath Family). Although *R. prinophyllum* is relatively common in parts of upstate New York, it is very rare on Long Island. In *Woody Plant Workbook*, edited by Steven Clemants in 1999, only four historical localities of early azalea are listed for Long Island. In 2014, Vicki Bustamante and Larry Penny reported a lovely population of this beautiful azalea from Hither Woods in Montauk. This species should not be confused with the more common pink azalea or pinkster-flower, *R. periclymenoides*.

Figure 3. *Fatoua villosa.* [photo by M. Conover]

***Tipularia discolor***, Crane-fly Orchid (Orchidaceae, the Orchid Family). New York's only extant population of *Tipularia* has been monitored for more than 100 years. In 1911, Roy Latham reported "a colony of about 30 plants at Greenport." In 1914, a fire swept through Moores Woods and Latham reported "it was decided that the forest fire had destroyed the colony" but the disturbance may have been beneficial because in 1927 Latham reported "100 plants in the main colony, with scattered plants far beyond the main stand." Recently, David Taft has been regularly monitoring the site and in 2014 counted 15 flowering individuals. Maybe the forest needs another natural disturbance to stimulate dormant plants?

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## Upcoming Programs

***(cont'd from back cover)***

**December 9, 2014* Tuesday, 7:30 PM**

**Members Night:** Members are welcome to bring photos, stories, specimens, and tales of peculiar sightings of favorite plants. A great opportunity to show what you have found while exploring on Long Island or elsewhere. Please call Rich Kelly (516-354-6506) in advance to advise as to the approximate number of images/slides that you would like to show and preferred medium of presentation. Thanks.

Location: Bill Paterson Nature Center, Muttontown Preserve, East Norwich

* Refreshments and informal talk begin at 7:30 p.m.
Formal meeting starts at 8:00 p.m.

Directions to Muttontown or Stony Brook: 516-354-6506

**Reminder - no meetings in January or February.**
**Next meeting March 10, 2015.**

Long Island Botanical Society
PO Box 507
Aquebogue, NY 11931



# Upcoming Programs

**October 14, 2014*** **Tuesday, 7:30 PM**

**James Lendemer: "Long Island Lichens: From Distant Past To Uncertain Future."** Lichens are fungi that are found in terrestrial ecosystems throughout the globe. From the highest mountains to the driest deserts, they often form conspicuous displays on rocks, trees, and soil where they are noticed by scientists, naturalists, and the public alike. This presentation will explore the natural history of the lichens of the New York City metropolitan region, focusing on Long Island. It will follow the development of the local biota from the distant past, to our modern present, and into the uncertainties of the future. Dr. James Lendemer is a post-doctoral researcher at The New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx. He and his colleagues in the Bronx are lichenologists whose research focuses on assessing lichen biodiversity, its patterns, threats, and conservation needs in North America and abroad.

Location: Bill Paterson Nature Center, Muttontown Preserve, East Norwich

**November 11, 2014*** **Tuesday, 7:30 PM**

**Eric Morgan: "Tropical American Botany Overview."** This talk will be an overview of some of the fascinating plants of the American tropics and subtropics, focusing on the northwestern Amazon and Caribbean where much of his work is currently being conducted. A primer on some of the research also being conducted on Long Island at Farmingdale State College will also be presented, with an update on some of the data on plant-insect interactions that will be presented in the near future. Dr. Eric C. Morgan is a professor in the Department of Biology at Farmingdale State College. He currently serves as the Chairman of the Botanical Society of America's Ecological Section, and on the Council of the Torrey Botanical Society.

Location: Museum of Long Island Natural Sciences, Earth and Space Science Building, Gil Hanson Room (Room 123), Stony Brook University, Stony Brook

*(Programs continued on page 35)*